

Title of Report:	Scrutiny review into the facilities available for young people	Item 9
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission	
Date of Meeting:	17 April 2012	

Purpose of Report: To outline the results of the investigation into the facilities available for young people in the District.

Recommended Action: That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission endorses the recommendations of the Task Group for the consideration of the Executive.

Task Group Chairman	
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Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) meeting of 2 August 2011, the Acting Head of Youth Services and Commissioning (Julia Waldman) provided an update on the activities available within the district for teenagers. This update was the latest in a string following a scrutiny review of the subject carried out between October 2008 and March 2009.
- 1.2 It was resolved at the meeting that Julia Waldman would provide a report back to the Commission at its meeting of 1 November, and a meeting was held on 16 August between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Mrs Waldman and scrutiny support officers to scope the contents of the report.
- 1.3 During the course of the meeting however it became clear that more value might be added to the public understanding of the issue if a fuller task group review were to be conducted. The Commission subsequently agreed to the set up of a cross-party task group review.
- 1.4 This report provides the findings and recommendations arising from the review and provides detail on its Terms of Reference and methodology.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1 The Terms of Reference for the task group were to conduct a review into the facilities available for young people in West Berkshire and, in particular:
 - Examine where, what kind, how many and by whom facilities and activities for young people are being provided
 - Assess the need and demand for facilities
 - Consider what might be done further to improve the facilities in place for young people, particularly in the context of Big Society developments and the withdrawal of support for universal youth provision by the Youth Service
 - Report to the OSMC thence the Executive with recommendations as appropriate.

3. Membership

- 3.1 The Members of the cross-party working group were Councillors Peter Argyle, Sheila Ellison, Alan Macro, Gwen Mason, Tim Metcalfe and Ieuan Tuck. Councillor Ellison was elected as the Chairman.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 The review has been conducted by a small, cross-party task group, working with Council officers and staff from other organisations.

4.2 The task group held the meetings outlined in the table below.

Srl	Meeting date	Meeting focus
01	Monday 31 October 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election of the Chairman • Agreement of the Terms of Reference • Background briefing on survey findings and previous Scrutiny activity (Jason Teal, Performance, Research and Consultation Manager; Jessica Collett, Policy Executive; and David Lowe, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager)
02	Thursday 24 November 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategic approach to provision of activities • Critical success factors and the barriers to achieving them • The link with anti-social behaviour (Dave Seward, Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People Chief Executive; Julia Waldman, Acting Head of Youth Services and Commissioning; David Appleton, Head of Cultural Services; and Susan Powell, Safer Communities Partnership Team Manager)
03	Monday 12 December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operational approach to the provision of activities (Lisa Beith, Area Youth Consultant, West Berkshire Council; Sarah Emery, Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People; Jenny McIntyre, Greenham Community Youth Project; Allan McIntyre, Neighbourhood Warden; and Sarah Steevenson, Former Chair, Thatcham Neighbourhood Action Group)
04	Tuesday 11 January 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of schools • Community planning (Val Houldey, Acting Chair, Secondary Heads Forum; Sarah Ward, Community Council for Berkshire; and Jo Naylor, Principal Policy Officer (Communities))
05	Tuesday 7 February 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of the recommendations
06	Tuesday 13 March 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement of the final report

4.3 The minutes from meetings at Srls 01 to 04 are shown at Appendices A to D respectively.

5. Acknowledgements and thanks

5.1 The Chairman and Members of the Task Group would like to acknowledge and thank all those who supported and gave evidence to the review.

6. Findings

6.1 The findings of the task group are outlined below.

Assessing need

- a. The experience from the parish plan development process is that communities face common challenges in providing enough and appropriate ways of giving young people things to do.
- b. 75% of communities in the District have parish plans in place and they are encouraged through the development process to seek the views of young people. Care however needs to be exercised in ensuring that, once sought, their views are followed through into action.
- c. Parish plans show that there is a demand for youth clubs and recreational areas including tennis courts, skate parks, goal posts and cycle routes/BMX tracks. Although the provision of physical assets frequently presents less of a challenge than overcoming the reluctance of adults to volunteer and provide support, it is not always the case that suitable premises are universally available.
- d. Frequently young people do not want to participate in organised activity, preferring to just socialise with their friends.
- e. There is a mis-match between the expectation of the public and the funds that are available for the provision of activities for young people. Since the public sector spending cuts and the resultant reduction in services, the non-state sectors have not fully replaced that which had been withdrawn.
- f. The best results are achieved when young people are allowed to articulate for themselves what it is they want and they do not have others speaking on their behalf.
- g. Agencies such as the Neighbourhood Wardens or police can provide valuable local knowledge about the location and the type of activities that might be established for young people. In their interaction with young people, they can also encourage participation.

Service delivery

- h. The Council's Youth Service's detached workers are engaged in promoting the positive image of young people by making them aware that they need to be considerate of others.
- i. West Berkshire Council is not now commissioning universal youth services but is focussing on vulnerable groups and young people at risk. Targeted and localised activities tend to be more successful in their take-up than more generalised provision. Communities however are cautious about taking over where the state has withdrawn.
- j. The use of the title 'Youth Service' by the local authority creates the unachievable expectation from the public that it caters for all the needs of all young people.

- k. The 'big society' concept of community delivery of activities for young people has largely been operating in rural communities for some time. Urban centres are therefore more likely to be affected by the withdrawal of the Youth Service.
- l. The Council's support to communities, for example by bearing the cost of CRB checks, is appreciated by other organisations also providing support. The provision of support, not just from the public sector, can be the difference between activities succeeding or failing.
- m. The substantial reductions in central government funding have had a major impact on the provision of youth services and the grant funding of projects. The local authority, parish councils, voluntary groups, schools, clubs and benefactors have had to take up much of the responsibility for funding for the delivery and maintenance of youth activities.
- n. There are significant numbers of facilities and activities in the district but they are not always delivered in a co-ordinated way. In general, people in more deprived areas are more aware of initiatives, as are the parents of teenagers. Activities might be categorised by:
- Whether they are free or chargeable
 - Organised or self-organised
 - Those based around public facilities – libraries, pubs, leisure centres, play grounds, skate parks
 - Those provided by schools – pre- and post-school activities, sports leadership
 - Those that are community based or run by voluntary organisations or interest groups.
- o. Clubs can help themselves in attracting and retaining volunteers by becoming more business-like, through the use, for example, of role descriptions or reducing the scope for off-putting open-ended commitments.
- p. Bringing young people together with older people in intergenerational activities can lead to increased engagement by young people in positive activities, a decrease in negative behaviour by young people, a greater understanding amongst adults of young people's behaviour and a community-wide improvement in the promotion and profile of young people.
- q. Schools provide a positive influence on young people outside of normal teaching hours through the growing use of after school clubs and other activities. Out of school hours activity frequently has a positive effect on the behaviour and confidence of young people, the most important of which is the opportunity to make friends. This leads directly to better educational outcomes.
- r. On leaving full time education, and the supportive and directive environment that it provides, many young people frequently do not have the necessary skills to understand the leisure-time opportunities available to them. Although improving, links are not always in place between schools and community groups and there is apparently some mis-understanding between them.
- s. The provision of a sports or playing field or park, with maintained facilities such as goal posts or a skating area that is kept clean and safe, frequently gives

better value for money than other more expensive facilities, for example a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).

- t. Frequently the success of clubs depends on a small number of key individuals, who have the necessary skills and ambition to ensure effective delivery. To retain their engagement requires significant amounts of support.
- u. Commercial facilities, such as sports halls or leisure centres, appear to be a resource available to young people and their support communities that has yet to be fully exploited.

Links between youth activities and anti-social behaviour

- v. National research indicates that the public generally inflates the extent to which young people are involved in anti-social behaviour and there are consequently widespread negative perceptions of youth. This creates challenges for young people. Despite a reduction in the volume of youth crime in recent years, public perception in West Berkshire is yet to change.
- w. Data from Thames Valley Police does not support the frequent assertion that there is a link between anti-social behaviour and an absence of things for young people to do. Young people tend to act anti-socially for a range of reasons (family background, mental health, emotional issues and peer pressure), not just because of a lack of available activities.
- x. Young people can be deterred from anti-social behaviour but doing so requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, family engagement and police enforcement, in addition to places for them to go and things for them to do.
- y. Demographics tend to dictate that there is more anti-social behaviour where there are more young people.

Communication

- z. An understanding of the variety and breadth of activities is not always easily communicated to young people, although the Youth Service has recently introduced a leaflet detailing activities, regardless of provider.

Obstacles and inducements to take up

- aa. The 'professionalisation' of youth services has worked against the establishment and operation of community groups and the increased requirement for training standards, CRB checks and Health and Safety legislation has deterred would-be volunteers. However, although sometimes seen as burdensome, the 'bureaucracy' of risk assessments and CRB checks is necessary in the modern age to give parents the assurance that their children are being appropriately cared for.
- bb. An absence of transport is consistently cited by both providers and young people as the number one barrier to accessing activities and facilities. This can be exacerbated by parental reluctance to allow their children to travel alone. The absence of places to meet to do the things that they want to do is the

second biggest hurdle. Prohibitive cost of participation also ranks highly, particularly for families who have more than one child.

- cc. Young people can be encouraged, but not compelled, to participate in activities and use the facilities provided. To expect otherwise is unrealistic.
- dd. A key determinant in ensuring that young people remain engaged in positive activities is the maintenance of a relationship as they progress through groups catering for different ages: a teenager is more likely to be involved in gainful activity if they began doing so at an earlier age than if not.
- ee. The lessons learnt and experienced from community youth activities do not appear to be widely shared between and amongst providers.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 West Berkshire remains a place in which there is much for young people to do and those working directly or indirectly in communities with young people find them to be generally courteous and well behaved, There remains however the perception that they are not well catered for and that they may consequently engage in anti-social behaviour.
- 7.2 The desire in most communities to provide more for young people can be sometimes be thwarted by obstacles that should be able, with the right commitment of those who are most able to influence them, to be addressed, if not totally.
- 7.3 In playing its part, the Council can demonstrate that its withdrawal from providing universal youth services is being replaced by a willingness to help communities to help themselves. Adoption of the recommendations following should go some way to assisting the achievement of that outcome.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Task Group recommends that:
 - a. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and Youth Service should work, including through the networks available to Elected Members, to encourage schools to enable community groups to access the use of their facilities.
 - b. The Executive Member for Finance, Property and Health and Safety should take steps to allow and promote the use of Council property by community groups. This should include through tenancy agreements for let assets.
 - c. The Executive Member for Partnerships, Equality, the Visions and Communities should encourage town and parish councils to allow the use of their property by community groups.
 - d. The Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operational), ICT and Customer Services should critically examine the opportunities for the Council to allow the public use of the Council's own transport fleet, particularly in locations where there is an expressed need for community transport, working to remove bureaucratic burdens and obstacles where they exist.

- e. The Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operational), ICT, Customer Services should introduce a mechanism to assess the extent to which Council transport assets are being utilised by community groups.
- f. The Executive Member for the Environment, “Cleaner Greener”, Public Protection, Culture and Leisure should identify measures to encourage and increase the use by community groups of the Council’s leisure facilities, for example sports and leisure centres.
- g. When considering change of use applications by and for community groups, the Executive Member for Planning and Housing should ensure that planning policies to allow favourable weighting and consideration of the wider societal benefits that their activities usually generate.
- h. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Youth Service should continue to support organisations, such as the Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People, that enable community groups to operate effectively, for example through the provision of training and CRB checks.
- i. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Youth Service should implement a comprehensive plan, which includes the use of social media, to communicate to young people the wealth of spare time opportunities and activities that are available to them.
- j. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Youth Service should create and promote guidance on the key steps to be taken on the establishment of youth community groups. This might take the form of a ‘Youth Club Starter Pack’.
- k. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Youth Service should take steps to identify and the remove those Youth Service practices that prevent or obstruct the use of its facilities by community groups.
- l. The Executive Member for Partnerships, Equality, the Visions and Communities should establish a mechanism to allow the sharing across community groups of resources such as training opportunities, skills, expertise and knowledge.
- m. The Executive Member for Partnerships, Equality, the Visions and Communities should encourage communities developing parish plans to consider items and activities that have a lower purchase/build cost but provide better value than more expensive but less flexible items such as Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs).
- n. The Executive Member for Strategy, Performance and Community Safety should ensure that budgets allocated for the provision of Community Wardens, across all contributing organisations, are protected to enable their invaluable work to continue.
- o. The Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Youth Service should ensure that budgets allocated for the provision of detached youth workers are protected to enable their invaluable work to continue.

Appendices

Appendix A – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 31 October 2011
Appendix B – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 24 November 2011
Appendix C – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 12 December 2011
Appendix D – Minutes of the task group meeting held on 11 January 2012